

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

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Inmates Reportedly Gave Spy Help in Coast Escape

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LOMPOC, Calif., Jan. 26 — Christopher John Boyce, convicted of selling secrets to Soviet agents, escaped from Federal prison through an intricate scheme that relied on precision timing, a forged document, a papier mâché dummy and the help of other prisoners, according to sources familiar with the case.

A dramatic account of Mr. Boyce's escape from the maximum security prison here last Monday was provided by a source at the prison who was close to Mr. Boyce. A Federal official said that investigators believed the general outlines of his account were true.

A prison acquaintance said that Mr. Boyce planned to make his way to Arizona to obtain classified Central Intelligence Agency documents that he hid before his arrest on espionage charges in January 1977. Then, this source said, he hoped to sell the documents to Soviet agents to finance his flight, possibly via Nicaragua, to another country, possibly Ireland, where he hoped to remain free.

Investigators said they had also heard reports that Mr. Boyce might be heading for Nicaragua and then Ireland, but said that they did not know whether the reports were true.

Baffled in Investigation

The disappearance of Mr. Boyce, 27 years old and the son of a one-time agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, left the prison authorities baffled. According to the bureau, no trace of him has been found, although some agents said they believed he was still hiding amid the rolling hills, studded with oak trees and chaparral, of this rural area 170 miles north of Los Angeles.

Mr. Boyce was convicted in April 1977 of eight counts of espionage and conspiracy to commit espionage and was sentenced to 40 years in prison. The Justice Department had charged that Mr. Boyce admitted he and a childhood friend, Andrew Daulton Lee, had sold "thousands" of Central Intelligence Agency documents to Soviet agents.

Mr. Boyce obtained the documents while working as a code room clerk at the TRW Defense and Space Systems Group in Redondo Beach, Calif., one of the C.I.A.'s principal suppliers of surveillance satellites. Mr. Lee, who delivered the documents to the Russians, is serving a life term at Lompoc.

In prison interviews last year, Mr. Boyce said he was a pacifist and wanted to make a "statement" showing his contempt for the arms race between the Soviet Union and the United States. He asserted that not long after he joined in the plan he wanted out, but that Mr. Lee, a convicted drug dealer who was a fugitive from the police, pressed him to continue. The young men said they got \$77,000 from the the Russians.

Another Account From U.S.

Justice Department lawyers ridiculed this account and asserted that the two had become spies for money and thrills.

Some California newspapers have published speculation that Mr. Boyce was helped in his escape from the prison,

which is being upgraded to become one of the Federal Government's most secure penitentiaries, by the Soviet Intelligence agency, the K.G.B., or by the C.I.A.

Prison officials and agents of the F.B.I. and the United States Marshals Service, who are investigating the escape, have dismissed both suggestions but have said they suspected that Mr. Boyce might have had help.

Confirmation of Investigator

They said Mr. Boyce was in his cell when a head count was taken at 4 P.M. last Monday, but that he was gone by the 10 P.M., when a check was made. They said they had established that he left the prison by scaling two 10-foot-high fences but said they did not know how he reached the perimeter of the prison, hundreds of yards from his cellblock across several logged checkpoints in an area generally off-limits to prisoners.

The account of the escape was provided by a source in the prison who said he was familiar with its planning and execution. An official who was helping to direct the manhunt for Mr. Boyce confirmed the basic points of the account. According to the prison source, this is what happened:

Planning for the escape began more than a month ago. Although Mr. Boyce had no outside help, at least three other prisoners helped. One, a friend of Mr. Boyce, was in charge of planning and obtained a pair of metal-cutting shears from a prison shop; another made a small wooden ladder in a prison woodshop, and a third forged a prison document vital to the scheme.

The first step in the plan was to have Mr. Boyce assigned to a crew that did maintenance work at the prison; this, the prison source said, took two weeks of negotiating but was apparently not regarded as suspicious by a prison official.

Several days before the escape, a prisoner obtained a blank form used to order maintenance work at the prison, and a fraudulent work order was prepared calling for the cleaning of an underground drainage tunnel not far from the two 10-foot-high chain link fences running parallel to each other along the back of the prison.

Blind Spot in Fence

The prisoner who was quarterbacking the escape had studied the prison layout and had determined that there was one spot along the fencing that could not be seen by the armed guards at a nearby tower, who had authority to shoot any prisoner between the two fences.

This "blind spot" for the guards was not far from the rear gate of the prison and a few feet from a drainage tunnel for which the work order had been forged.

Last Monday morning, the maintenance crew was allowed to enter the off-limits area along the fence to clean the drain. About 3:30 that afternoon, the work crew left — all except Mr. Boyce, who went into the tunnel. A manhole cover was placed over him.

One person who said that he was present said he told Mr. Boyce, "Good luck, Bud," and, just before the manhole cover was lowered, the convicted spy answered, "Look me up sometime."

After Mr. Boyce was left behind in the tunnel, his confederates went to work.

Fashioned a Dummy

Several days earlier, Mr. Boyce, who had once fashioned a huge papier mâché bird in a prison art class, had made a bust of himself out of papier mâché. Another prisoner painted a face on the head, and Mr. Boyce clipped off some of his own hair to give the dummy verisimilitude.

When guards checked his cell at 4 P.M. that day, they saw the form in his bed.

Mr. Boyce, under to the plan related by the prison source, was at that moment supposed to be in the tunnel, waiting for darkness to fall.

He was to pick up the makeshift ladder, about three feet high, that had been taken to the tunnel and take it to the first of the two fences, which was topped with several strands of barbed wire connected to an electric alarm system.

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Snipped Wire at Top

If all went according to plan, he stood on the ladder and snipped four strands of the wire that another prisoner calculated could be cut without breaking the circuit of the alarm system. He then climbed through the opening in this barbed wire and jumped down.

The second fence was topped by long coils of razor-sharp wire. He climbed the fence and, with the shears, snipped the razor wire; he taped together one side of the coil, and then the other, to create an opening he could squirm through, and then apparently ran into the darkness.

Meanwhile, the prisoners who helped in the escape had already been to Mr. Boyce's cell; after the 4 P.M. head count, they removed and destroyed the dummy, ripped up most letters and documents in the cell and flushed virtually every trace of Mr. Boyce down the toilet; they then splashed paint and paint thinner throughout the cell to remove fingerprints. The prison source said they wanted to make the cell "like he had never lived there."

According to friends of Mr. Boyce, he had become obsessed with the idea of escape and decided to make the attempt after a request for reduction of his 40-year sentence was denied last month by Federal District Judge Robert J. Kelleher, who had officiated at his trial.

Perry Gilbert, a 23-year-old convicted bank robber from Seattle who has been placed in solitary confinement as a result of the prison investigation of the escape, said in an interview today:

"In my honest opinion, Mr. Christopher Boyce will never be caught. He hates prison. He won't be taken alive; it's not that he will put up a fight, I just think he'll run until they shoot him down."